

TENNESSEE FOLKLORE SOCIETY BULLETIN

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GAMES OF LONG AGO

If folklorists become enthusiastic about the teas, charms, and poultices for the treatment of diseases long ago, why, wouldn't the games of the same period be of equal interest?

Anyway, many people believe that the games of a folk are of as much importance as are their wars and political struggles.

Naturally, our games begin with the baby just as early as he is able to enjoy them. If these old games have not been entirely in accord with present-day methods of amusing a child, at least they worked; and a surprising number of seemingly normal people lived through them and became useful citizens.

The games below were handed down in my family.

- (1) Hold a hand high above the child and say:

"Old bee way up yonder, z-z-z-z
Come down get in the belly gut, belly gut"

By the time "get you" is reached the hand is on the child's stomach, and he is gently shaken.

- (2) Perhaps few children have passed babyhood without riding on someone's foot. We said:

"Ride a horsie, go to town,
Take little (child's name)
And don't fall down."

An unexpected "fall down" is part of the game.

- (3) "Pat-a-cake" is a good game to begin teaching rhythm. Take one of the baby's hands in each of yours and chant, clapping time with his hands.

"Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, baker's man,
Make a cake as fast as you can.
Roll him around, roll him around (Roll child's
palms together)
Throw him in the oven."

The last line is said more quickly and in a louder tone while making a throwing motion with the baby's hands.

- (4) "Digging 'Taters" was always a prime favorite in our family. Take baby's head between your hands and say:

"Old man in the garden digging 'taters.
He looks this way (turn child's head to right)
He looks that way (turn child's head to left)
He sees nobody coming: dig, dig, dig."

Make digging motions with child's head while saying "dig."

- (5) Put a finger on each feature named, and say:

"Forehead bender,
Eye peeper,
Nose dropper,
Mouth eater,
Chin chopper."

Then put hand down under the child's chin on his breast and say "guggle, guggle, guggle" while you gently shake him.

- (6) In another game with the features, say:

"Knock at the door (Tap child's forehead)
Peep in (Hold finger before his eyes)
Raise up the latch (Put finger under his nose and
give a little push up)
And walk in." (Pretend to put finger in his mouth)

- (7) Take the baby's foot, tap on it, and say:

"Drive a nail here, and drive a nail there,
And let the little colt go barefoot."

- (8) To count toes, begin by taking the child's big toe between your fingers, and say:

"This little pig says, 'I'll steal corn.'
(second toe) This one says, 'Where from?'
(third toe) This one says, 'Mama's barn.'
(fourth toe) This one says, 'I'll tell.'
(fifth toe) This one says, 'Woo, woo, I'm so
little I can't get over the barn sill.'"

The little toe is gently pulled and jerked as though it were trying to climb.

From baby games the child graduates to "William Tremble Toe," "Club Fist," "Granny Hobble Gobble," "Chickie-ma-crainic-crow," "Frog in the Mill Pond," and others.

By the time he reached school age he was ready for "Whoop and Hide," "Rotten Eggs," "Stink Base," "Mollie Bright," "Fox in the Morning," "Seven Sticks," "Antnie Over," "Puss I Want Your Corner," and others with equally fancy and perhaps corrupted names, but great fun nevertheless. All of the above games are old, but some of them, especially "Chickie-ma-crainic-crow" and "Mollie Bright," must date back much farther than the others, judging from the old witch motif in them.

Singing games for children did not seem so numerous; however there were a few. Some of the most popular were "Green Gravel," "Marching Round the Lily" (Levee), and "Polly Put the Kettle On." These were perhaps stepping-stones to the singing games of the young people, who hid their dance steps behind innocent tunes rather than incur the displeasure of their elders, especially those who "belonged to the church."

Telling tales, guessing riddles (two are appended), running games, ball games, hiding games, counting out (four rhymes are appended), singing in were types of fun that amused the children of yester-year. We can but wonder if present-day youngsters are as capable of finding hearty, wholesome amusement.

Appendix

A. Riddles (Related by my father)

- (1) "Under gravel I go
On cold hard iron I stand
I ride the colt that never was foaled
And tote the mother in my hand."

Answer: A girl was to be punished but was told she might go free if she could make a riddle no one

could guess. She put gravel in her hair, a piece of iron in her shoe, killed a mare that was to bring a colt, tanned the colt's hide and made a saddle upon which she rode, and took the mare's skin and made a whip which she carried in her hand.

- (2) "Riddle me, riddle me right
Where was I last Friday night?
The wind did blow, the trees did shake
To see what a hole the Fox did make."

Answer: A Mr. Fox tried to collect a debt from a man who couldn't pay. Mr. Fox decided to kill the man, but first told him he could go free if he could make a riddle no one could guess. The man followed Mr. Fox one night and saw him digging the grave; he then made the riddle.

B. Counting-out Rhymes

- (1) Oneric, oric, okric, ann,
PhileSon, pholoson, nicholson, john,
Succovic, quavic, English navy,
Stingam, stangem, buck.
- (2) One zoo, zo zoo, zig-a-zaw, zan.
Bob-tailed dominecker, dee, do, dan.
Hailom, scalom, Virgin Mary
Zinktum, zanktum, buck.
- (3) Ink, stink, stiddle my stow,
Nobody stinks but bare lie you. }
- (4) One, two, three, out goes he
On the old dirty dish-rag.

-- Mrs. L. L. McDowell

EARLY DAYS

In the early 1820's General Jackson's Military Road was completed, connecting New Orleans with the military headquarters at Nashville, Tennessee.

This road became the thoroughfare along which stock was driven from pasture-land in Kentucky and Tennessee to southern markets, principally Mobile and New Orleans. There were droves of horses, mules, and hogs; herds of cattle; flocks of sheep and, believe it or not, turkeys. Taverns were established along the road for the benefit of the stockmen, and as traffic increased, stage stands were set up. Each tavern had its bar, where the thirsty herdsman could "wet his whistle" and "cure his hoarse throat." Games were set up, such as catching the greased pig, shooting the turkey's head, and so on. There were also indoor games, and dances with home-made fiddles and folksongs furnishing the music. Among the folksongs was the ever-popular "Hog Drover's Song." This is played as follows.

A poll of the party is taken, and the surplus men, married and single, are drafted to take turns as the Tavern Keeper. The girls are selected by lot to act as his Daughter. These two take their stand before a door-way (or other prominent place), and the Hog Drovers form in a double line and march by, singing

"Hog drovers, hog drovers, hog drovers we air
A-courting your daughter so rich and so fair
Can we get lodging here, oh, here,
Can we get lodging here?"

The Tavern Keeper sings in reply:

"This is my daughter who stands by my side
And no hog drover can get her for his bride.
And you can't get lodging here, oh, here,
And you can't get lodging here."

The Drovers make another circuit, then sing:

"We care nothing for your daughter much less for
yourself,
We'll travel on further and seek better wealth.
And we don't want lodging here, oh, here,
And we don't want lodging here."

The Drovers march again and sing their first stanza. In the meantime the Daughter has picked out a young man from the ranks, and the Tavern Keeper sings again:

"This is my daughter who stands by my side
And Mr. (name) can get her for his bride.
And he can get lodging here, oh, here,
And he can get lodging here."

The chosen man drops out of line, and he and the Daughter retire to a corner to refresh themselves with pop-corn and roasted chestnuts. A second Daughter is chosen, and the game goes on until all the Drovers and Daughters are paired off. Then come refreshments and maybe a dance.

And such a supper! Wild pigeon and quail, roasted on a spit; venison steaks and lye hominy; corn meal "light" bread baked in an oven; wild plum preserves and honey in the comb; pumpkin pie; and, last but not least, wild cherry wine.

-- C. L. Wood

RHYMES, SONGS, AND DITTIES

Folk rhymes and ditties recited or sung in childhood hold a permanent place in the affections of Mid-South people. Witness the response that comes through the mail to a casual mention in the Greenhouse of those old bits of nonsense.

For example, there was the flurry over "William Trimbletoe" in the fall of 1943. I revived the old counting-out rhyme, and scores of replies came in from readers all the way from Texas to Virginia, and from Ohio to Louisiana. The Virginia and South Carolina versions make it "William Ma-Trimbletoe," with the extra syllable. But without fail, readers come up with the part that goes:

"Wire, brier, limberlock,
Three geese in a flock;
One flew east,
One flew west,
And one flew over the cuckoo's nest."

Then there was "Old Dan Tucker," once popular at parties all over the South and elsewhere. Scratch anybody over the age of consent and find a familiarity with:

"Old Dan Tucker was a mean old man,
Washed his face in a frying pan;
Combed his head with a wagon wheel,
And died with a toothache in his heel."

Chorus: Get out the way, Old Dan Tucker,
Get out the way, Old Dan Tucker,
Get out the way, Old Dan Tucker,
You've come too late for to get your supper.

Old Dan Tucker, he got drunk,
Fell in the fire and kicked up a chunk;
A red-hot coal got in his shoe,
And, oh, my gracious, how the ashes flew."

Chorus.

Again, there was "Skip-tum-a-loo," verses of which were recalled by many readers. Here are some.

"If you can't get a red-bird, a blue bird'll do,
If you can't get a red-bird, a blue bird'll do,
If you can't get a red-bird, a blue bird'll do,
Skip-tum-a-loo my darlin'.

"Flies in the buttermilk, what'll I do,
Flies in the buttermilk, what'll I do,
Flies in the buttermilk, what'll I do,
Skip-tum-a-loo my darlin'.

"Frogs in the bread-tray, kickin' up dough,
Frogs in the bread-tray, kickin' up dough,
Frogs in the bread-tray, kickin' up dough,
Skip-tum-a-loo my darlin'.

And so on. They don't make much sense, but the simple nonsense rhymes and the catchy melody served to pacify youngsters, probably "riding grandpa's foot."

Still again, nostalgia had an inning when the Greenhouse inquired about an old-fashioned pacifier employed by mothers and grandmothers long ago: a dab of butter and sugar tied up in a scrap of muslin and dipped in warm milk, and then inserted judiciously into baby's mouth. More than one hundred enthusiastic readers exclaimed, "sugar tit," and many protested when the editor insisted on being crude and spelled it "teat."

A reader wrote in to inquire about the origin of the lines "If I had a cow that gave such milk, I'd dress her in the finest silk." By the dozens, eager-to-be-helpful readers identified "Little Brown Jug." Many wrote out the rest of it, and a few enthusiasts called by telephone to sing the old song to whomever might listen.

All of which suggests that the devotion to folklore is not

confined to those who compile it. Many readers confess they hadn't thought of many of these old things for years, but once they're reminded they sit down and put the recollections on paper.

-- Paul Flowers

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Tennessee Folklore Society is invited to meet on the campus of George Peabody College, Nashville, Tennessee, on Saturday, October 28, for its annual meeting.

In an attempt to do our small part in reducing traveling during war-time, the Society did not meet last year. It seems most desirable that we should do so this year. We need personal contact with each other; we need the stimulus of a program; and we need to transact a little business which will insure the growth and vital continuance of the Society. We hope that all members who possibly can will plan to be in Nashville on October 28, for the usual morning and afternoon sessions.

Rooms will most likely be available on the Peabody campus for those who come from a distance and might like to remain over night. More information will be sent out nearer the time for the meeting with additional information about the program and arrangements.

Meanwhile, will you anticipate the meeting and plan to come? The officials of the Society and the administration of Peabody extend a warm invitation to every member.

Susan B. Riley, President

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Occasionally the Bulletin deviates from its practice of printing one long article, and devotes an issue to a number of shorter things. The three articles this time deal with games of various kinds, from the nonsense games used to amuse babies to the playparties of the young people.

Mrs. L. L. McDowell, author of the first of these articles, is no stranger to TFS members. Both she and her late husband were charter members of the organization and faithful attendants of the meetings. With Mr. McDowell, she is co-author of Songs of the Old Camp Ground (1937), and Folk Dances of Tennessee (1938).

Mr. C. L. Wood, who wrote "Early Days," is from Columbus, Mississippi. He saw the Bulletin mentioned in Paul Flowers' Greenhouse, and sent the manuscript on the chance that it might be of interest to us. It is, and we welcome Mr. Wood to our columns.

The Greenhouse, incidentally, should be of interest to all of our readers. Mr. Flowers, in the letter that accompanied his manuscript, says:

"I'm still in the market for contributions from TFS people. I suggest they get a copy of the Commercial Appeal, look at the Greenhouse on the editorial page to see the tenor of the thing. It runs six days a week, which should give plenty of opportunity for many to be heard."

Mr. Flowers would also like information on Lorenzo Dow, the eccentric evangelist of the early nineteenth century. The editor referred him to Dr. Jackson's White and Negro Spirituals, but doubtless some of our readers can give him other references.

He may be addressed at the Commercial Appeal, Memphis, Tennessee.

* * *

In the December issue the leading article will be drawn from Mrs. Ruth O'Dell's unpublished "History of Cocke County." Mrs. O'Dell very kindly sent us the manuscript notes for this work, and it contains a wealth of material of interest to the folklorist as well as to the historian. She speaks of two of the games given in this issue. "Hog Drovers" is given with some slight variations, and of "Skip-tum-a-loo" she says:

"It offers more originality in verse making than many of the others. The boys choose their partners, and all form a circle, in the center of which stands an OLD MAN. When the singing begins, he skips about the circle and chooses a lady, swings her, then skips to another place in the circle. This forces her escort into the center. He chooses a lady and repeats the same procedure, skipping with her to another place in the circle and forcing another escort into the center. This is carried on indefinitely, with verses that are never sung in the same order."

Besides the verses Mr. Flowers gives, Mrs. O'Dell lists the following:

"Lost my partner, what'll I do?"
 "I'll get another one pretty as you."
 "Hurry up boys, you're getting mighty slow."
 "My wife skyped and I'll skip too."
 "Little red wagon painted blue."
 "Can't get a tall one; a short one'll do."

* * *

A Maryville reader has a colored maid whose speech is a constant source of joy to the family. On one occasion she paused in her dusting to watch a neighbor who was walking up

the street. The neighbor is very tall, and at the time, she was obviously in a hurry. Said Freddie: "There goes Miss Ruth, like she's walkin' right straight out of this world."

* * *

In a previous issue we noted the use of the term "building-house" to denote an ordinary dwelling. Two readers sent us examples of similar hyphenated words.

The first occurred in a little store on the outskirts of Waynesville, North Carolina. Two boys dropped in for a Coca-Cola. One of them had a cow's-horn slung around his shoulders on a bright-colored cord. He explained that they had been hunting a couple of dogs lost on a fox-hunt the night before. The storekeeper inquired, "Where did you get your tootin'-horn?"

The second came from a retired Episcopal clergyman. When he was younger it was his custom to go on long fishing trips in the Smokies every summer. When night came he usually looked for a friendly mountain family with whom to bargain for food and lodging. On one such occasion at the supper table he was passed a bowl with the invitation: "Have some sop-gravy fur to wollop yor vittles in."

Jackson, George Pullen, The Story of the Sacred Harp,
1844-1944, Nashville, The Vanderbilt University Press,
1944. 46pp.

This attractive little volume is, as the title tells, a centennial piece, carrying in compact style the story of the Sacred Harp, from its publication in 1844 by B. F. White and E. J. King through the century in which it has served as one of the principal collections of religious folk song and the manual of scores of neighborhood singing societies over a wide area in the South.

The book has bibliographic value, for it deals carefully with the matter of editions and of companion and rival publications. It is, moreover, a valuable document in social history, making clear, as it does, the strong role played by Sacred Harp Singings in developing a social and religious tone in the communities where they have flourished.

And, particularly, those who know Dr. Jackson will note in it his own warm personal enthusiasm for the songs and the singers of the Sacred Harp. Added to other reactions it has made the reviewer want a copy of The Sacred Harp, which can be had by sending Dr. Jackson, 1715 Temple Avenue, Nashville 4, \$1.50 plus ten cents for postage.

E.R.H.